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SIPDIS

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NSC FOR ZKHALILZAD, JDWORKEN, HMANN, RHANSON, DSEDNEY
DEPT FOR SA/PAB, SA/AR, S/CT

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SUBJECT: SE KHALILZAD'S APRIL 11 MEETING WITH NDS CHIEF
ENGINEER AREF

Classified By: AMBASSADOR ROBERT P. FINN FOR REASONS
1.5 (B) AND (D)

1. (S/NF) Summary: SE Khalilzad met on April 11 with National Directorate of Security (NDS) Chief Engineer Aref to discuss current security conditions, his views on proposed US-Afghan-Pakistan trilateral discussions, and to review NDS reform. Aref told SE Khalilzad that Pakistan was indeed promoting instability in Afghanistan and that trilateral discussions might offer a way to address these activities. Aref reported that security conditions were generally good, but that the central government still lacked authority in the provinces. Also, the NSC, as a new institution on the Afghan scene, was struggling to find its appropriate role and assert its authority on security matters within the Cabinet. Finally, Aref noted that the appropriate strategy for NDS reform had been worked out with US assistance. End summary.

2. (S/NF) SE Khalilzad met with NDS Chief Engineer Aref on April 11. Khalilzad was accompanied by Ambassador, COS, NSC, Rebecca Hanson, DOD/OSD, Mustafa Popal and Econ/Commo (notetaker). Khalilzad said his perception was that the security situation was generally good, but that the Taliban was regrouping. Khalilzad asked Aref his views in this regard, and solicited his views on Afghan security conditions and assessment of NDS reform. Khalilzad also proposed a trilateral military-intel working group (Afghan-Pakistani-US) to address Taliban and extremist activities in Afghanistan. Engaging Pakistan to cease its support of extremist activities was one main goal of this working group, SE Khalilzad said.

3. (S/NF) Aref noted that ISI activities in Afghanistan were still a problem, and that such ISI officers are deliberately promoting extremism against Afghanistan. Peshawar-based ISI Officers including Sultan and General Wahid were tasking Afghans to work against the Afghan central government. Aref alleged that ISI agents/assets working in Kandahar and Jalalabad were providing free passage to terror elements to cross into and out of Pakistan in vehicles loaded with arms. Aref said this showed that Pakistan did not recognize Kabul as Afghanistan's central authority. (Note: Aref alleged that 6,000 safe passage permits for Afghan commanders had been issued) NFI.) In light of these activities, Aref agreed that trilateral talks were a good idea, and could supplement other contacts planned with ISI) NFI. SE Khalilzad noted he would raise the possibility of opening this trilateral channel with President Karzai during discussions over NDS reform.

4. (S/NF) Aref said security had undoubtedly improved compared to the previous year. The NDS had begun many new projects with American assistance. According to Aref, 90 percent of their efforts had been successful, but five to ten percent of enemy plans had succeeded (including sabotage and provoking provincial tribes against the central government). Aref noted that the enemy program to assassinate key leaders) including President Karzai and Minister of Defense Fahim) was still in place. Aref noted that the war in Iraq had inspired the madrassas to increase propaganda for jihad against Americans and the infidel Karzai government. In addition to propaganda, the Taliban had attempted small-scale attacks (e.g., in Zormat and Kandahar). Aref noted that NDS foiled these attacks, adding that the Taliban strategy was to find isolated pockets and manipulate the local population.

5. (S/NF) Aref said that the Afghan government had certain political weaknesses. It has not been able to assert its control over the provinces, and is not even in the position to fire bad governors. Aref said that, nonetheless, the government had many achievements) especially in the security sector) but more was needed to improve the lives of Afghans. We cannot simply police them, Aref said, and nothing else. Aref added that the National Security Council structure was a completely new experience in Afghanistan, and that it would take time to find its place and appropriate role in the system. The NSC was discussing how to incorporate Ismail Khan and General Dostum into the government in Kabul. Aref thought a solution would help improve security conditions in the south as well. In general, Aref continued,

there are internal and external threats. Of the internal threats, Aref emphasized the reluctance of certain prominent elements within the Cabinet to implement the decisions of the NSC. Aref noted he had passed messages about this to both the President and ORCA, as U.S. lives were also at stake. Aref added that sometimes the government makes a decision that is not well communicated to other parts of the government.

16. (S/NF) Aref said that clashes within the government were not based upon ethnic or political differences) as some thought. He offered the example of Minister Jalali, who was an expatriate and a Pashtun, with whom he has quickly established a good working relationship. Jalali is given broad license to interact with NDS elements without first receiving clearances through Aref. Aref offered one solution to some of the problems discussed. His suggestion was to make former King Zahir Shah more effective. The former king enjoys respect and wants to help unify the nation, particularly with problems in the South.
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